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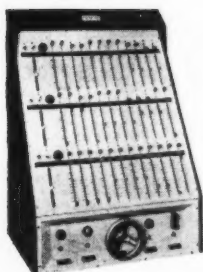
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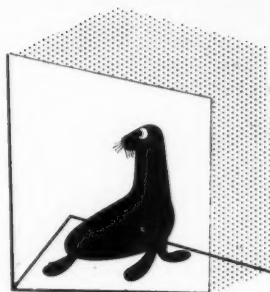
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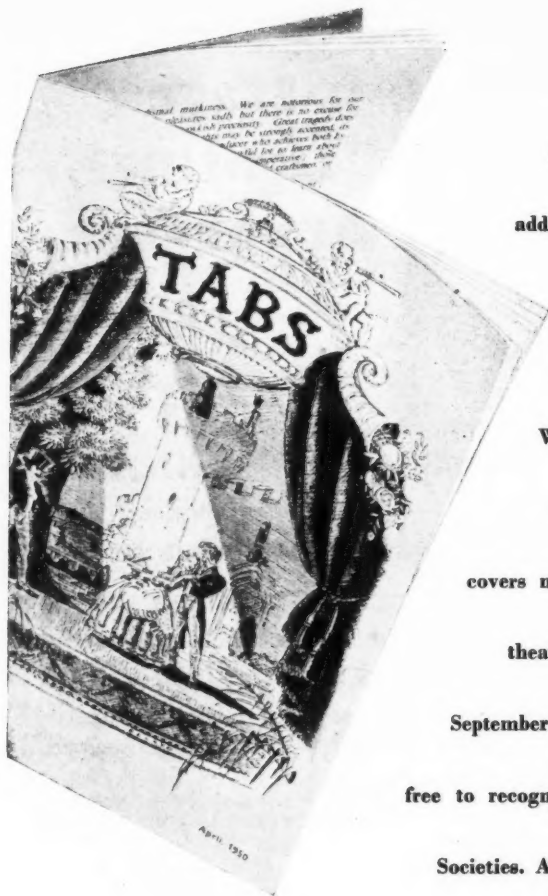
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DRAMA

The Quarterly Theatre Review

NEW SERIES

NUMBER 20

A TRIBUTE TO GEORGE BERNARD SHAW 1856-1950

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A BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE PUBLICATION



*The Master of British Comedy seated upon the Lion in his vegetarian garden:
a caricature by Edmund Dulac.*

A FEW MEMORIES

by Gilbert Murray

THE world has during the last months lost two men, both great and famous, but singularly different one from the other, as different almost as the Two Masks of Drama: General Smuts, a wise man of action, with gifts to direct and guide a tragic world; G.B.S., a master of comedy who would have us find the same world not tragic after all, only wrong-headed and therefore the funnier. From the one the last fatal message came after long endurance and changing hopes. From the other, after the first shock, the messages were till the end light-hearted, showing the old undefeated courage and friendliness which have so long made even his victims forgive and love him.

Writing and doing are very different. Of course they are. To a man of letters and wit, the funniest thing you can think of is often just the thing to write; it can seldom, if ever, be the best thing to do. The most prudent thing you can think of, on the other hand, may be excellent statesmanship, but will not often make attractive copy. Both men were friends of mine. I had been in frequent communication with Smuts ever since the beginning of the League of Nations movement; Shaw I had not often seen lately, but he retained for me that peculiar halo which seems to surround the friends of one's real youth. I knew him first when I was in my early twenties and he in his thirties, an amazing young man with a red beard, bold views on music and philosophy and most other subjects, and a number of plays which no prudent manager would produce. What hopes we had then, and what ideas! We were both teetotallers, both vegetarians, both great "world-changers," to use a recent

keyword of Shaw's, but, unlike other world-changers, neither of us at all noticeably grumbly or unamiable.

He advised me once about a play of mine, *Carlyon Sahib*. I had sent it for an opinion to William Archer, and he showed it to Shaw. Archer had suggested some re-writing; Shaw differed. "No, no; what's the good of re-writing? It is a good play with bad parts, as it is. So are all good plays! No. Write another and another; when you have written a dozen, you'll know ever so much more about it." How like him!

I saw a good deal of him at Fabian meetings, and still more during the Vedrenne-Barker management at the Court Theatre, when Euripides and Shaw and St. John Hankin and Galsworthy filled the bill month by month. He was, of course, a beautiful producer. No rehearsal was ever stale or dull. He never spared people's feelings and never hurt them either, because he somehow established an atmosphere in which one knew that all the worst was openly said, and nothing but friendliness and good will left behind.

I once made some suggestion to him about a play to write—perhaps it was a continuation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, showing Petruchio completely tricked and made obedient by Katherine while still imagining he was master; whatever it was, he turned on me, saying: "I can't. I'm doing a play called *Murray's Mother-in-Law*." This proved to be *Major Barbara*. When the first draft of it was finished, he looked in on me in Oxford, saying, "I say, were you a foundling?" "No." "Do you mind my saying you were a foundling?" "Not in the least." So he proceeded to say it of me, under the name of Cuzens. That unprincipled

young man does not in my own judgment seem particularly like me, but since he quotes some of my undoubted writings as his own work I cannot altogether repudiate him. My wife and her mother provided some of the characterisation too, and he read us the play in order to make sure that nothing was likely to hurt. What a treat it was to hear him read! There was first the delicate variety of tone, but still more there was the rollicking boyish enjoyment of his own jokes. On one occasion long afterwards, when by ordinary human standards he was an old man, I heard him reading *Too True To Be Good*, and commented on his boyish vividness, and he said, "Oh, second childhood." It was a childhood that never left him.

Shaw was never much of a democrat. He was a fastidious intellectual, but of course of an Irish type. I have known few people whose pleasures were so almost exclusively pleasures of the intellect. What he liked was conversation, wit, imagination, a new idea, a new experience, a new book of philosophy, and of course a good deal of music and a little poetry. Give him those, and he was content. He wanted no particular sensual pleasures, and even pains did not distract him much. I once went to see him at Hindhead when he was covered with bruises owing to a particularly bad fall downstairs. I thought he would be in bed; but no, they told me; he was in the garden. I looked about and heard a distant chuckle. There he was in a hammock, writing away, wrapped in bruises and bandages, and chuckling gaily at the result. His wit and humour were real and inexhaustible. The great majority of comedians have not quite enough real wit to carry them through; when it runs thin they eke it out with a bit of indecency or perhaps spite, and get their laugh with most audiences. But Shaw, though he speaks freely of everything, never falls back on such mean second bests. Has there ever been a satirist so free from personal malice?

He would make violent political attacks, of course, and denounce innocent public men as fools or villains. But that was for public reasons, and, when charged with intolerance, he made the surprising answer: "Who am I that I should be just?" This is not so absurd as it sounds. He never wrote as a judge, always as an accuser or an advocate. He attacked the things he considered wrong, showed them up as ridiculous, illogical, oppressive; he vividly over-stated his case against them. It was for others to pronounce judgment. I once came away with him from hearing a speech of Sir Edward Grey's. It had been just in Grey's manner; a moderate, unadorned, fair and absolutely convincing statement. Shaw thought it very poor indeed. It had none of the qualities that he valued; no wit, no eloquence, no happy phrase, no new point of view or illuminating paradox. It was, in fact, the just judge speaking, not the brilliant advocate.

I think I see why he called himself a Socialist, when he was really just the opposite, a born "insurrectionist" and mocker, who never wanted to plan other people's lives and would not for a moment tolerate having his own planned for him—especially not by paid officials in accordance with some prevailing convention. When he began his rebellions he soon became sick of ridiculing Conservatives, Whigs, even Radicals, anything that could be called the current fashions. Socialism at that time sounded extreme, and very few people, except perhaps the Webbs, really believed in it. It gave Shaw a stand for ridiculing accepted ideas, which he lost when Socialism in its turn became conventional and fashionable. Controls and democracy and conventional "Leftism" grew like bramble bushes all round him; so he was forced in honour to see the good points in Fascism, to take the name of Communist, and at any rate to pour ridicule on democrats and "world changers." He had still a part

to play, and how brilliantly he played it, with unflagging wit, good humour and freshness; and valuable advice, too, so long as you remembered that he was not trying to be just.

It was easy to find faults in Shaw. People spoke of his conceit, but I doubt if he at all overrated his powers. "G.B.S." as Mrs. Shaw used to say, "is

really a shy man. That is why he never dared to go to America." In the last summing up he lived a fine life. He brought a keener and brighter edge of thought into English writing. He fought hard but without malice. And he never ceased to raise a flaming protest against cruelty to man, woman or beast.

G.B.S. AT REHEARSAL

by Lewis Casson

IT was in 1904, nearly fifty years ago, that I first saw G.B.S. at work directing rehearsals. The play was *Candida*, in the production that laid the foundations of the famous Vedrenne-Barker management at the Court Theatre. A wealthy business man, J. H. Leigh, an amateur reader of Shakespeare, then owned the theatre and in 1903, to gratify his young wife, had mounted *The Tempest* and *Romeo and Juliet*. In 1904 for the next play, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, he asked William Archer to recommend him a director. Archer suggested a promising young actor whose work had lately attracted attention with William Poel and the Stage Society, Harley Granville-Barker. He undertook the job on condition that during the run he could put on four matinees of *Candida*. I was playing Eglamour, my first meeting with Barker, and so, though I was not in *Candida*, I saw something of the rehearsals, which were conducted by Shaw himself. The organisation on the stage side of the production (apart from the casting which they shared) was in Barker's hands, the business side in those of Vedrenne, Leigh's manager. In his whole history as a producer of his own or anyone else's plays, I never knew Shaw take any serious practical interest in anything beyond the casting and the acting. All the rest, including scenery, costumes, lighting and group-

ing, was of very minor importance, and personally, as a director, I sympathise with him. His printed stage directions manoeuvre his characters so that each speaker is fully seen and well lit, and as, in his plays, attention is almost always on the speaker rather than the listener, this simple rule usually suffices. If it results, as it often does, in a sort of Christy Minstrel group, he had no objection.

The success of those *Candida* matinees led to the partnership of Vedrenne and Barker for a series of plays to be performed at matinees the following autumn. The second of this series was *John Bull's Other Island*. I was one of a small group engaged on contract for the season and so this was the first of Shaw's plays I saw rehearsed from the beginning at its first production. It was in many ways a unique play. It was the first one publicly produced before it was published, so that it was entirely new. It was the last play written while he was still unsure of its being produced, when he was still seeking a market. In this sense it was a turning point. When he wrote his next, *Major Barbara*, he was sure of its production, for the success of "John Bull" with the public, as well as with Edward VII himself, followed by the success of *You Never Can Tell* and the even greater success of *Man and Superman* in 1905, had firmly established

both him and the management. *Major Barbara* already showed signs that in the theatre he had found a pulpit, and from then on, with some wonderful exceptions like *The Doctor's Dilemma* and *Saint Joan*, he tended to use the theatre rather than serve it, by over-emphasising the polemical at the expense of the dramatic.

In 1904 Shaw was only just beginning to be known as an acted dramatist. His plays were being performed fairly regularly in Germany. In America, Mansfield had performed *Arms and the Man* and *The Devil's Disciple* with fair success, and Robert Loraine was trying to find backers for *Man and Superman*. But England, as usual, was lagging behind. Charrington had tried out *Candida* on tour. Forbes-Robertson and Murray Carson had done the same with *The Devil's Disciple*. But in London Miss Farr's production of *Arms and the Man*, at Miss Horniman's expense, remained unique, and few but the select Sunday audiences of the Independent Theatre and the Stage Society had seen Shaw acted. He must then have been about forty-eight, but he looked much younger; his hair and beard still flaming red, his eyes bubbling with merriment and mischief, with a boyish apologetic chuckle, almost a giggle, at his own jokes, and a ready roar at anyone else's. A long lanky figure, with an easy springy stride like a hunting dog.

SHAW AS DIRECTOR

Before this season the only two directors of note I had seen at work were Charles Fry and William Poel, both skilled hands in Shakespeare; and admiring the mastery of G.B.S. in *John Bull's Other Island* I had no idea then how very little experience of direction he had actually had. And so it did not seem to me such a miracle as it might to see old stalwarts like Louis Calvert and John L. Shine, both masters of their craft and directors themselves of vast experience, not merely meekly, but enthusiastically

accepting Shaw's detailed direction. He could not, at that time, have directed more than three or four productions, almost all for private performance. How did he manage it? First, I suppose, because good actors at once recognise and respect a good actor (even if they dislike him, an impossibility in this case), and Shaw was a mighty good actor. Whether he could have carried a characterisation through a whole evening, I don't know, but in giving a vivid half-minute sketch of a character as a demonstration, I know few better. So his suggestions to any other good actor on how a character would react, always rang true and were readily accepted. In those days, too, much that a director now has to do in the way of coaching was quite unnecessary. Nearly all actors had grown up in a tradition of good technical speech and movement, had always been surrounded by it, and so knew instinctively how to get lines over, hold attention and make points. Two wars have destroyed all this and if the director can't, or won't, coach, the actor learns, if he can, by trial and error in front of the public. He frequently doesn't. In later years, when it was wanted, Shaw could and did coach his actors. His combined technical training in music and public speaking enabled him always to analyse how effects were got, and to pass on the knowledge of *how* as well as *why*. It was the same training that enabled him in his writing, instinctively to arrange his thought and his words so that when spoken with their full intent and meaning they produce good music in melody, rhythm and phrasing; and surely that is the test of good prose. One of the troubles is that his Irish melodies are often too long and elaborate for an English actor to retain or reproduce, and without them much of the significance and emotional appeal of the lines is lost.

Other valuable assets of Shaw were his perfect manners, his acute sensitivity to, and consideration for, the



"SAINT JOAN"; the first production at the New Theatre, London, in 1924. Sybil Thorndike, Jack Hawkins and Robert Horton in the third scene, against the backcloth of the River Loire designed by Charles Ricketts.

other man's feelings, and his clever use of quite insincere flattery to get the best out of his actors. This last sometimes led to difficulties. A misfit who had to be replaced after trial would sometimes reply that Shaw had told him he was perfect!

From 1900 to about 1920 Shaw directed himself the first English production and all London revivals of all his plays. Afterwards he began to share his labours: *Heartbreak House* with J. B. Fagan; *Back to Methuselah* with H. K. Aylliff; *Saint Joan* with me, and so on. But up to 1920 this was his rule, and the only time I ever saw Shaw tired was in that year, when he came daily to our *Candida* rehearsals after mornings spent wrestling with Mrs. Patrick Campbell in the first revival of *Pygmalion*.

On the other hand, he seems to have been distinctly careless about foreign presentations. The interpretations of *Saint Joan* in Berlin and Paris, for instance, quite shocked him when he eventually saw them in England after long runs in both cities; and I fancy some American productions of his plays would have had much the same effect.

HIS CONDUCT OF REHEARSALS

His actual plan of campaign at rehearsal had no remarkable features. In the case of a new play he always began by reading it himself to the company. If the author or director is a good reader that is always the best plan. The actors then absorb unconsciously the shape of the play and not only a good general idea of their characters, but much of the actual detail of the music and phrasing of the dialogue. The reading over, he plunged straight into rehearsal, including positions and moves, for which he always had a clear plan, without any preliminary lectures or group discussion. Most actors prefer this, as they think and imagine better when they are on the move. At this period of rehearsals G.B.S. would be on the stage with the company, when he could talk freely to the actors, and interrupt and

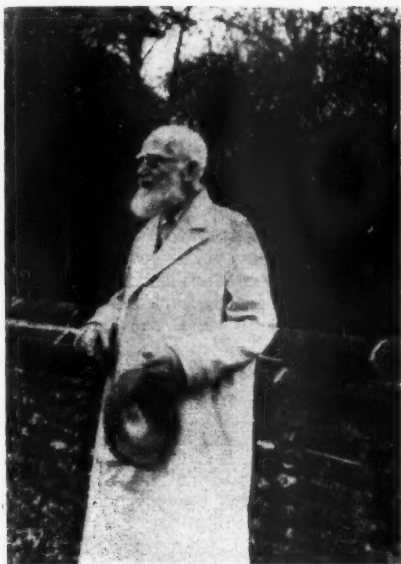
interpret. He was always patient, but quite persistent in getting eventually exactly what he wanted, so far as the actor was capable of it. I never remember his teaching any actor an intonation parrot-like, but he had the power, the skill and the vitality to make his version seem the obvious and only one, and one can certainly say that by the time rehearsals were over every phrase and pause had been considered and deliberately passed, either as his intention or as near as the actor could get to it. He was always open to argument, and would do his utmost to get round a difficulty rather than make an intelligent actor do something his instinct told him was false.

THE PACE OF PERFORMANCE

Every play consists of a series of phrases embodying ideas, mental pictures, unsatisfied questions, and so on. If the number of these ideas conveyed to an audience per minute is too low, they are bored; if high enough, they are interested. The number can be kept high either by clearly conveying every idea in turn, like shooting at a target a series of carefully aimed arrows, or by throwing handfuls of ideas at the target at high speed, so that a fair number per minute stick and the rest are wasted. Shaw's method was certainly the former, and for plays as full of important ideas as his it is doubtless the best. But not to excess. Most of his own productions at first played too slowly. Twenty minutes were saved in the case of *Heartbreak House* after the first night, and twenty-five of *Saint Joan* without cutting a word or, I think, losing any ideas.

When the musical and intentional framework had thus been fixed, Shaw would retire to the back of the circle and let whole scenes run through without interruption, taking elaborate notes in exquisite handwriting on a large drawing pad, while the actors first floundered with their words (a process peculiar to England and America, which reject the Continental

Probably the last photograph of GBS :



And his inscription on the back

To Robert Harcourt
from
The Oldest Inhabitant
of
Ayot Saint Lawrence,
the Dotard
G. B. S.

2nd April 1950

prompter) and then gradually got the feel of the scene and "lived" their parts. The subsequent checking over of these notes with the actors might entail much repetitive rehearsing with him on the stage again till he got what he wanted, but never when he was in front did he interrupt the actor with corrections at the time. In this respect a model director!

As an interpreter of his own plays Shaw was, I think, inclined to overdo the comic side. There was something of the eternal schoolboy in his love of slapstick and "dressing-up" (as opposed to costume), and I suppose this same instinct led him in his production to underline the comic. The Epilogue of *Saint Joan* is a good instance. There is assuredly an intensely comic idea in the canonisation of a Saint by the Church that had burned her. But at the first production, he so overemphasised this with overplaying and funny business, that although Ernest Thesiger and I induced him to modify this con-

siderably at rehearsal, it still shocked the audience far more than was necessary and marred the essential beauty of the play's design. This opens up the whole question of whether an author is his best director, which is a large one. Nevertheless we deplore that we have no chance of knowing directly Shakespeare's intention and meaning in his plays. Each generation has had to research and interpret for itself from the printed word. Even in my time there have been great changes in the whole stage approach to Shakespeare and great efforts are made now to recapture the effect that he originally meant to achieve. We were given a better chance with Shaw, but we missed it. If our National Theatre had been completed in 1916, as everybody then hoped, Shaw's own tradition would have been preserved not only in the printed texts, as with Shakespeare, but in living productions that had been handed down to us by the master himself.

SHAW AS DRAMATIST:

I. THE SHAVIAN TECHNIQUE

by H. F. Rubinstein

“THE stage but echoes back the public voice”—or so, echoing Dr. Johnson, the pundits are always happy to assure us. When we reply that Shaw (following Ibsen) gave the lie to all that, they start pontificating about *St. Joan*, as though the Maid were Everybody’s Sweetheart, and conveniently forgetting that for thirty years before Dame Sybil Thorndike persuaded playgoers to swallow that religious masterpiece, Shaw had been building up his reputation as a world-dramatist, while gradually infiltrating into the West End of London. It was largely a matter of wearing down the resistance of managers and critics, for whom his airy derision of the “well-made play” was sufficient proof that the revolutionary “conversations, discussions and so forth,” with which he persisted in wooing the playgoing public, could not possibly be called plays. “Dialogues, if you will,” their spokesman, Mr. A. B. Walkley, is represented as conceding to the ingenuous Fanny, *à propos* a Shavian “First Play” (which, incidentally, ran for 624 performances a decade before *St. Joan* was written), “Exhibitions of character, perhaps: especially the character of the author. Fictions, possibly, though a little decent reticence as to introducing actual persons . . . might not be amiss. But plays, no. I say NO. Not plays.” With *St. Joan*, Shaw came into his kingdom. But in the writing of its immediate predecessor, *Back to Methuselah*, he “threw over all economic considerations and faced the apparent impossibility of a performance during my lifetime”—an impossibility happily to materialise within a short period of its publication.

Well, he could afford to take risks by then, perhaps, and his own words imply that at least the technique of his earlier plays had not been uninfluenced by economic considerations. Which sends us back to Dr. Johnson’s pronouncement—to a familiar couplet following the line already quoted:—

The drama’s laws the drama’s patrons
give,
And those that live to please must please
to live.

To what extent, then, we may ask, did the pre-Methuselah Shaw, however grudgingly, defer to or compromise with the dictates of the Box Office? Certainly, as a seasoned First Nighter, he had a serviceable bag of tricks to play with, if he had wanted to play. But that, in fact, was not what he wanted. Consider the last full-lengther of that period, *Heartbreak House*, alias “cultured leisured Europe before the war” (of 1914–1918)—a play inspired by the kind of mood that drove Dante into the Inferno, and out the other side of it. It is Shaw’s *Hamlet*, and perhaps therein lies one key to the secret of its undoubted entertainment value. Like *Hamlet*, it oscillates between different levels of interest—thematic variations unified in a permeating consciousness of doom. There are verbal quips on the groundling level; above, layers of comedy rising to the elevation of that rich scene where Ellie, confessing her romantic passion, is interrupted by the entrance of “a very handsome man of fifty with mousquetaire moustaches”:

Ellie (rising in glad surprise): OH! Hesione:

This is Mr. Marcus Darnley.

Mrs. Hushabye: What a lark! He is my husband.

On higher levels, we are moved by the

spectacle of wasted, rotting lives, by Mazzini-Dunn's innocence, by the flaying of "Boss" Mangan. On the highest level, the spirit of Captain Shotover lifts us far above all mundane concerns.

In *Heartbreak House*, the technique reaches its perfect flowering, but Shaw was experimenting with it from the beginning. Thus in *The Philanderer* emotional undertones are imperfectly relieved by comedy laid on with a trowel. The problem was to integrate spiritual incongruities. It came to be solved by the provision of a rarified atmosphere, as magical in its effect as the hypnotising poetry of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, against which conflicting motifs could be stated, as it were, contrapuntally. A notable accomplishment in this art is the scene in *The Doctor's Dilemma* where, after gasping out his faith in "the redemption of all things by Beauty everlasting," Dubedat rests on the bosom of his devoted Jennifer, to die presently amid loud laughter from any normal audience. A *tour de force* of a different order, a fantastic non-stop debate dispensing altogether with physical action, published as Act III of *Man and Superman*, and known to the theatre as "Don Juan in Hell," overtaxes the capacity of the ordinary human mind. Here, as elsewhere, the author's purpose, as well as his pocket, suffers from the insufficient sweetening of his pill; a pill, the correct recipe for which was formulated by a mystic of the fifth century B.C.: "serious things cannot be understood without laughable things." Shaw's main preoccupation as a playwright has been to transmit ideas, the fruits of an "abnormally normal" inner eyesight, irrespective alike of economic and aesthetic considerations. In a ceaseless tension between immovable earnestness and irresistible wit, the wit in turn feeds and derives nourishment from the earnestness. Seeing through the lies with which Everyman habitually deceives and justifies himself to bolster up self-esteem, Shaw could

demolish as well as invent the legend of an infallible G.B.S.; and, by the same token, he deflates, on principle, John Shaw-Tanner, Julius Shaw-Caesar, even, tenderly, Captain Shaw-Shotover. Self, in its various posturings, has ever been his main target, and, indeed, to aim elsewhere would be to betray his vocation. For, to one with the roots of drama in him, entertainment is only a means: the end is enlightenment concerning the mysterious relationship between the self and Godhead.

Enlightenment can proceed from education, and there are lessons—usually in humility—to be learnt from all Shaw's plays. He is an expert in driving a lesson home. Sometimes it comes with a punch, more often with a paradox. Shock-tactics are his *forte*, and, like a conjuror, he prepares his tricks by inducing the audience to look everywhere except in front of their noses. The classic example is Candida's line, "I give myself to the weaker of the two," at which a carefully laid fuse explodes in a flash illuminating the entire play to its esoteric conclusion. But though he makes his points with an apparent ease which conceals both acquired skill and native artistry, what he has never been able to conceal is the hall-mark of his style. This has led to the superficial observation that all his characters are mere Shavian mouthpieces—which is true enough of more than a few. But how flexible is that style, and what grace and charm of personality he can impart, where heart as well as head is engaged, as in the Franciscan simplicity of *Androcles and the Lion*. That play is described as a Fable, and like all good fables—and all Shaw's plays—it is also a sermon. Unconsciously he follows one who taught in parables, and it is perhaps fitting that the final scene of those *Farfetched Fables*, which, alas, ended his contributions to dramatic literature, is set in a Sixth Form class-room. However unconventional his methods, he has served us as a good schoolmaster.

2. AN APPRECIATION

by C. B. Purdom

"I am not governed by principles; I am inspired, how or why I cannot explain, because I do not know; but inspiration it must be; for it comes to me without reference to my own ends or interests."

BERNARD SHAW wrote every play under the illumination which he thus describes. Yet there never was a more practical dramatist, nor one who knew more precisely what he wanted. He used every art and trick of the stage, and set out to keep his audience's interest to the end, employing the element of surprise both in dialogue and situation. He never forgot that his plays were written not for the reader but for an audience: that is, not for the individual but for a company. Therefore, he aimed at obvious and elementary effects, even though he was "getting over" subtle ideas; and appealed to crowd psychology, though he aimed at the one who had ears to hear. His characteristic as a dramatist was not so much that he put actuality on the stage as that he selected absurd, contradictory and topsy-turvy actuality, not simply for the sake of arresting attention, but also because it was true. That is why he annoyed many who saw his plays. He was so near the truth as people know it, yet he took them far from what they were willing to admit. He upset the public not only through his "energetically egotistic fighting style," but because he wanted to do so. In his "rejected statement" to the Censorship Committee in 1909 he said:—

I am a specialist in unmoral and heretical plays. My reputation has been gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals . . . I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinions in these matters.

He was a master of stage-craft even though in regard to "incidents, plot, construction and general professional

and technical qualities of the play, I am . . . a very old-fashioned playwright," as he said in 1898. "I write in the classical manner," he said in 1924, which is the profound truth about Shaw as dramatist: he was classical as was Shakespeare—indeed he was soaked in Shakespeare. It is because of this that his plays will live.

Shaw used climax early in his plays, usually in the first act, and the rest is almost invariably anti-climax. This is the true explanation of the charge against him that his plays were not plays. Critics are accustomed to the climax of the play at the end; they were used to waiting for it; so to get it in the first act and be made to sit in the theatre when they should be going home, and forced to consider what follows the climax, was something they didn't like, because it was unfamiliar. The early plays are tight and tidy, but as he grew older his construction became looser, not because he cared less about the drama, but because he became indifferent to the audience. He refused to give way to human weakness in the theatre, and demanded that he should be listened to at any cost. In *Man and Superman* he began to depend upon talk, which he carried to an excessive length in the last act of *Major Barbara*. He called *Getting Married* a discussion, and in *The Apple Cart* actually made his characters sit down in a half-circle, while his later plays were almost wholly talk. Shaw is often found fault with because it is said that his plays do not contain real people; but his characters are as well defined as any to be found in dramatic literature; and they move on the stage with as convincing an air as any people that have existed in that world of pretence. Certainly they are all Shavian, cut to Shaw's measure, and no one could sup-



"HEARTBREAK HOUSE"

at the Cambridge Theatre, London, in 1943. Robert Donat as Shotover and Deborah Kerr as Ellie, in the setting designed by Cecil Beaton

pose that they came from any other mind or hand than his.

Shaw made large demands upon the actor and paid him greater respect than is usual. In the preface to *Plays Pleasant* he said of his method of writing:—

To the actor I have been more considerate, using all my cunning to enable him to make the most of his technical methods; but I have not hesitated on occasion to tax his intelligence very severely, making the stage effect depend not only on *nuances* of execution quite beyond the average skill produced by the routine of the English stage in its present condition, but on a perfectly sincere and straightforward conception of states of mind which still seem cynically perverse to most people, and on a good humouredly contemptuous or profoundly pitiful attitude towards ethical conventions which seemed to them validly heroic or venerable.

Shaw's plays appear to be easy to act in the sense that, like Shakespeare's, they seem to act themselves. In fact, they are difficult. He had an exact idea of what he wanted, as his stage directions prove, which are as much studies in theatrical technique as literary embellishments of the text. It is to be feared that he seldom got what he asked for on the stage. He said remarkably little about actors since he gave up dramatic criticism, but it would not be far out to guess that what he thought about them would be unprintable. He wrote a brief account of his experience with Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree in connection with the production of *Pygmalion*: he got, he says, at His Majesty's, "a sort of production." His early letters to Florence Farr, edited by Clifford Bax, contain the best short writing on acting by anyone.

Shaw's plays were often treated farcically, even guyed, with the author's approval, not because he thought that to be the right treatment for them but because he couldn't get actors capable of playing them as they should be done, and he was all for "lightness of heart" and fun on the stage, if the real thing could not be got. As a producer of his own plays he was highly

popular among actors, being not only pleasant to work with but himself an actor who could demonstrate what he wanted. From my own observation I think he often got results that were inferior to what another producer could have achieved because, reconciling himself to the actor's deficiencies, he was inclined to let the actor get away with being merely comic when something much more was demanded. I have heard actors say that there are no "actor's" parts in Shaw; but that is from actors who want parts with which they can do as they like, transforming the part into their own personality. Shaw would not let the actor do as he pleased, he asked the actor to interpret the part, not write the play for the author.

Shaw did not set out to be a playwright of the heart but of the head. There indeed we touch his weakness, as has so often been pointed out; but it would be a mistake to suppose that he lacked heart. It would be nearer the truth to say that he had excess of it. He dared not trust his heart, so he intellectualised passion, bringing it into the light. He thus tended always to intellectualise a situation rather than to emotionalise it. Higgins in *Pygmalion* represents Shaw's attitude to emotion, which, of course, is not his true attitude, only an adopted one. Let us observe that the light in which his characters live is by no means without vibrations of feeling. The passion in *You Never Can Tell* is true passion, and in every one of the plays there is an undertone of feeling, which explains the origin of the rhetorical speech which is Shaw's great technical achievement. His rhetoric is not mere logical speech; its merit is in exuberance, in rhythm, in colour—in other words, in feeling. So that it is false to say that Shaw's plays lack feeling: the feeling is disguised to look like something else: in short, he feels so much that he must go on talking.

Shaw started his dramatic career as an anti-romantic and he kept it up. Our stage for years has had few

romantic writers though many pretenders, and what people miss in Shaw is the absence of romantic pretences. He is in that respect a clean writer. In one of his dramatic criticisms, when he was but a prentice playwright, he wrote, "To me the play is only the means, the end being the expression of feeling by the arts of the actor, the poet, the musician." This declaration should not be forgotten, for he proved the truth of it in his work.

Shaw did not possess the supreme disinterestedness of the tragic poet. He was a comic genius, but not a satirist or sceptic, for he was on the side of the believers, the poets and visionaries. In his plays it is the poet, the fool in worldly matters, Marchbanks, Dick Dudgeon, Dubedat, Blanco Posnet, Androcles, Captain Shotover and St. Joan to whom he gave affection and for whom he invited ours. It is impossible not to be impressed by his idealism, or to remain unaffected by his feeling for what is beautiful and noble. The best comedy is nearest to tears, he said. Though we must admit that tragedy

was beyond his powers as it is beyond those of every other writer of our time, let us remember that the reverse of the mask of tragedy is the mask of comedy, which means that to laugh at the folly of mankind belongs to the employment of the Gods. Shaw's significance goes beyond mere comedy, because what he says does not end in a joke but in a vision of life, which gives meaning to his work, so that we do more than smile when we hear him. "Though my trade is that of a playwright, my vocation is that of a prophet," he said in 1932. Because he was a prophet he is the dramatist of the future. "I believe in the life to come!" says Anna in *Man and Superman*. Shaw announced the future, that which is to come, and therefore his plays will endure; for by the words of the prophets men live! He speaks for those yet unborn in whom the new man and the new society will be affirmed. "Is no enough?" he asks in his play of prophecy, *Too True to be Good*. The answer is "For a boy, yes; for a man, never."

3. A CRITICISM

by Clifford Bax

BERNARD SHAW was a close friend of my uncle Belfort Bax, a forgotten pioneer of socialism in this country. In the 'eighties and 'nineties they used to attend concerts at the Crystal Palace, the baton being wielded by August Manns. They were fellow-rationalists, reformers and atheists. (You may remember Shaw's phrase in a lecture, "Coming back to our old friend God" . . .) They were obviously much influenced by the onslaught of science upon traditional Christianity.

I have heard Shaw extolled as a saint, a philosopher, a mystic, the

best stylist of the age and, of course, its greatest dramatist. "A saint," I suppose, because he shunned alcohol and animal food, claims to sainthood which would include large portions of the Indian population. A philosopher? This is a title, I suggest, which ought only to apply to someone who attempts a systematic interpretation of the universe and of ourselves. A mystic? Surely, every mystic has had, like Boehme and Traherne, an ever-present sense that there is a spiritual world within the world of the senses, and that it is the more real of the two? The best stylist? Shaw wrote a lucid,

athletic, strongly rhythmicised prose, so easy to speak that all actors praise it; but it does not employ half the instruments in the orchestra. It never expressed pity or tenderness or a sense that life is a tragedy. George Moore was a man who felt a childish envy of any writer who attained to success wider than his own, as we see in his petty strictures on the oak-tree prose of Thomas Hardy. Still, he did achieve an exquisite surface of words, using several instruments which did not interest Shaw. And once, hearing so much praise of his Irish rival, he exclaimed: "Shaw's style? It is—it is like—it is like *linoleum*." What can be more serviceable and less beautiful than linoleum? Our greatest dramatist? That depends on what you want in a play, and a discussion of the claim will form the essence of this article.

He was about forty when he became fairly well-known, and I should guess that it was the Barker-Vedrenne season of his plays (1904) that started his immense and world-wide renown. This may seem surprisingly late because he was then forty-eight, but this fact explains the whole wonder of his career. The aesthetic 'nineties were too fastidious to rave about such a cocoanut-shyer: and there were still multitudes of old Victorians who supported the literature and the drama which they had admired in youth. As they died off, the younger generation was knocking at the door, and it was a generation which scientific materialism had easily persuaded to ignore the profound sayings of Jesus, to rebel against conventions, to regard family life as unendurably restrictive, to question whether marriage was "really necessary," to assume that God was a myth in the savage mind, and no longer to think of men and women as invisible "souls." Now the time was ready for Wells and Shaw.

Both gave to young people a doctrine of rationalism, which precluded any sense of the spiritual world, and a doctrine of socialism which ignored

the fact that men and women are not numbers to be neatly and mathematically arranged. Shaw seemed, to Dr. Joad and innumerable young persons of the same generation, to have swept away thousands of old cobwebs and to be an exciting deliverer. But the most successful writers of the period threw out the baby with the bath-water. Let us admit that the Victorian bath-water had certainly become murky, but to leave out of consideration that religion might not be old nonsense and that the soul might be more permanent than the body, was an attitude making directly for the inhumanity of Belsen.

Let us consider the much-praised plays. Their arid intellectuality and their adolescent heartlessness made an instant appeal to all the young persons who prided themselves on being unromantic, on seeing life realistically. But, just as a born religious, like Francis Thompson, may have a permanent apprehension of the spiritual, so does the born Romantic see life as a romance, a pursuit of intense emotions which, as in a fairy story, leads to adventures not always delightful. This high-flying use of life went out of fashion, and into fashion came Bernard Shaw, Wells and Erewhon Butler. I lived through this phase and remember it clearly.

We have not space in which to examine the whole of Shaw's dramatic output, but let us look at a few of the plays. *Candida* is essentially unsound because the managing type of woman, seemingly admired by the author (as we see in *Captain Brassbound*), is a person who has no sensibility and no appetite for the arts. She is, therefore, the last woman who could have enchanted even a minor poet. Somebody said that a poet should marry his cook: but any poetaster, such as Marchbanks, would shudder from the prescription. It might have suited Milton, but not Marchbanks.

Getting Married is mere back-chat sustained by Shaw's old group of



"FOUR FAMOUS COWBOYS"

Lord Howard de Walden, William Archer, G. K. Chesterton and G.B.S. dressed as cowboys for a film, with J. M. Barrie in the middle. From "*Bernard Shaw through the Camera.*" (B. & H. White Publications)

marionettes, including even the "silly soldier-man." *Methuselah* must be impressive to materialists with its ideal of living as long as possible in one physical body; but it seems dull and pointless to anyone who has studied the metaphysical philosophies of India. *Heart-break House* may come in time to be regarded as Shaw's best play, yet even here, after endless chatter, he had to re-awaken the piece by discovering a burglar at the bottom of the garden. *St. Joan* has been consistently lauded, and indeed it reveals his dramatic prose at its most muscular: but what should we think if Mrs. Eddy had written a play about Herbert Spencer? It is just as incongruous that a rationalist should attempt to delineate the personality of a girl who would have been negligible had she

not been a visionary. Shaw should have written a play about Mrs. Sidney Webb. Of course, if you have no belief in visionaries, you feel no outrage.

Finally, what are we to say of *Androcles and the Lion*? It is sheer vulgarity. I know that we may take a joke too seriously, but it is much more culpable to make a joke of something which was serious indeed. Only a lack of sensibility could have persuaded Shaw to use the early Christian martyrs as figures of fun. Even during the latest war there can have been no more heroic men and women. I can see Shaw's temptation, for the most serious subjects lend themselves most easily to jibes. That is why there are so many "jokes" which depend on the word "God." "*Androcles*" was in disgustingly, unimaginative, bad taste.

A LETTER FROM BERNARD SHAW

IT has seemed appropriate to the Editor of DRAMA that this Bernard Shaw Memorial number should include a letter which he wrote to me some months before his accident. As a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature he was due to receive a copy of the tragi-comedy *The Change of Crownes* by the Hon. Edward Howard which I edited from the manuscript prompt copy for the Society. There was some accidental delay in his copy reaching him, and I sent him a postcard to say that I hoped this Restoration play had now reached the author of *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*. Howard's play was performed at the Theatre Royal on April 15th, 1667, before the King and Queen, and Charles II was so annoyed with the sub-plot in which a country gentleman, Asinello, thinks he can get preferment at Court by bribery that he sent the actor of the part to durance and forbade for a time the Company to act.

I thought that perhaps Bernard Shaw would send one of his famous postcards in reply to mine but was surprised and highly gratified to receive the following letter, typewritten but with his autograph signature.

Ayot Saint Lawrence,
Welwyn, Herts.

28th April, 1950.

Dear Frederick Boas,

The Change of Crownes has arrived safely. The first thing that strikes me about it is that it is described as a tragi-comedy, a term which I supposed to be entirely modern and introduced to describe Ibsen's *Wild Duck* and the like. In the seventeenth century a tragedy was a play in which the hero was killed, and a comedy one in which he was married. Though Comic Relief was *de rigueur* (grave-digger in *Hamlet*, porter in *Macheth*, Asinello in *The Change*) nobody except Howard, as far as I know, ever dreamt of calling them tragi-comedies.

This suggests to me that *The Change* was regarded as a revolutionary novelty, and that Charles's displeasure was not political (why should he be offended by a legitimist play?) but an anticipation of Edward VII's remark on seeing a play of mine for the first time, "The man must be mad," meaning me.

There is one stage direction that has puzzled you, "Act Ready." This has nothing to do with the literary side of the play. In my youth (1860-70) there were no tableau curtains. The acts were separated by the descent of a canvas blind with a heavy roller, painted by Telbin or Louthenberg, representing a vast classic landscape with a Greek temple in the background or the like. At the end of the play a green baize curtain slid down on rings. The picture was called the act drop and the green baize the curtain; but the man who worked the winches on the gridiron floor from which the scenes were hung to be raised or lowered (technically "the flies" because the scenes were said to be "flown.") called the act drop simply "the act" to distinguish it from the green curtain, and was warned by the prompter by ringing a bell (hence "ringing up or down"). The stage direction was noted in the book "Act Ready," which meant "stand by to lower the act drop when I ring again." *The Crownes* copy seems to have been used as prompter's copy, author's copy, stage manager's copy, anybody's copy.

G. Bernard Shaw

The fact that Thomas Killigrew had described two of his plays in 1641 as "tragae-comedies" does not detract from the personal interest of the first paragraph, ending with a characteristic Shavian quip. And the second paragraph is an instance of what pains Bernard Shaw would take to throw light from his unique experience upon any theatrical problem. I am indeed in his debt.

F. S. BOAS.

SHAW AND THE STAGE SOCIETY

by Allan Wade

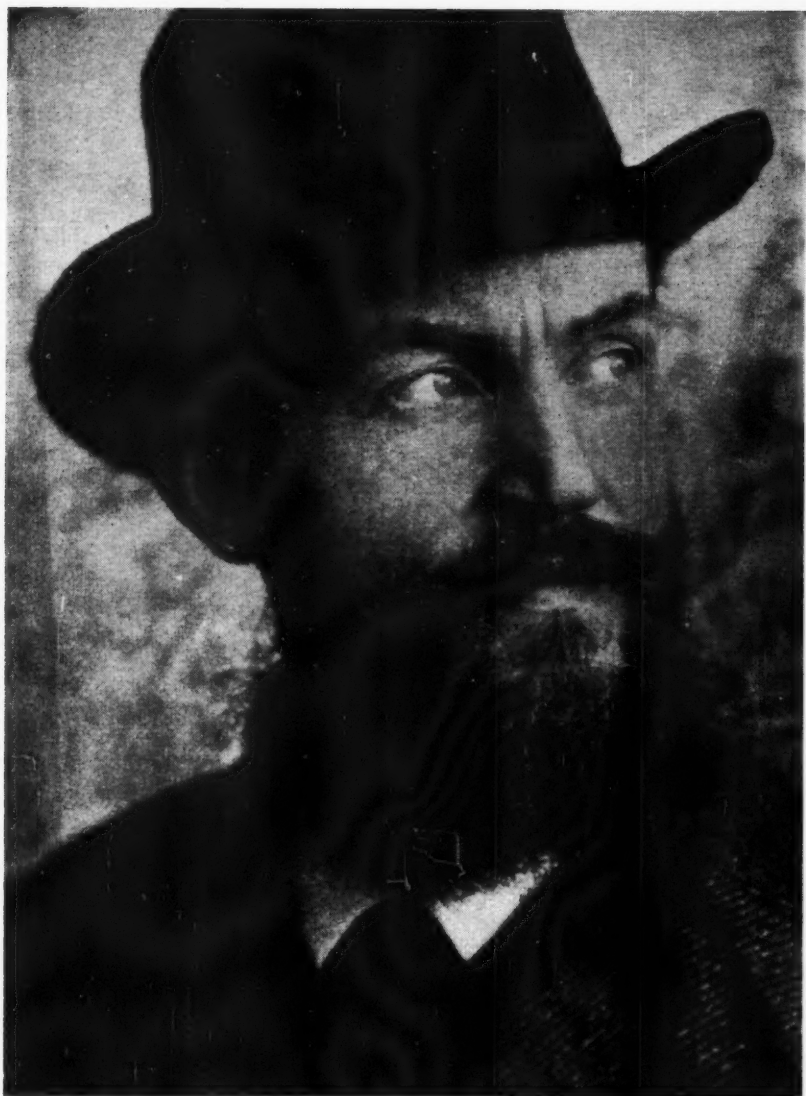
JUST over half a century ago a meeting, destined to have far-reaching results, was convened at that house in Red Lion Square where William Morris and Burne-Jones once shared rooms. The invitation was issued by Janet Achurch, famous for her pioneer work in Ibsen, her husband Charles Charrington, Walter Crane, Grant Richards, a young and enterprising publisher, William Sharp, busy making a second literary reputation as the elusive "Fiona Macleod," and Frederick Whelen, then an official in the Bank of England. About 150 people known to be interested in dramatic art were invited and of these some forty turned up. Then and there it was decided to form a private society for the production of plays unlikely to be given by any of the established theatre managements. As Grant Richards had published *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* only the year before it seems highly probable that some of these were already in the promoters' minds; and when the Stage Society was launched, with a membership limited to 300, *You Never Can Tell* was announced for early performance.

To obtain the services of professional actors it was decided to play on Sunday evenings, a proceeding then unheard of in London, and one which caused considerable nervousness to the theatre lessees, even though the performances were discreetly called "meetings" and were given for members of a private club. The difficulty was only overcome by an understanding that there should be no publicity, and members of the Society who happened to be dramatic critics were asked to make no reports

in the Press. It is told that, at the first production on November 26th, 1899, representatives of the police arrived to question the legality of even a private performance in a theatre on Sunday, and were adroitly involved in a long argument by Mr. Whelen and others until the play was safely over.

So successful was *You Never Can Tell* that six matinees of it were given next year at the old Strand Theatre. "Six matinees!" wrote Max Beerbohm in the *Saturday Review*. "Why are the commercial speculators who control theatres so obtuse as not to run Mr. Bernard Shaw for all he is worth? I assure them he would be worth a very great deal to them. In the course of the next decade or two, they will begin to have some glimmerings of this fact." But the commercial speculators remained obtuse and it was left for the Stage Society to continue the good work. In their fifth production, Hauptmann's *Coming of Peace*, appeared a young actor named Granville Barker, and Shaw was at once convinced that the right actor had been found to play Marchbanks, the poet in *Candida*. Play it he did, at the sixth "meeting," and "his performance," Shaw wrote later, "was, humanly speaking, perfect." Thus began that association of actor-producer and playwright which was to endure for fifteen fruitful years, and leave each of them at the top of their respective professions.

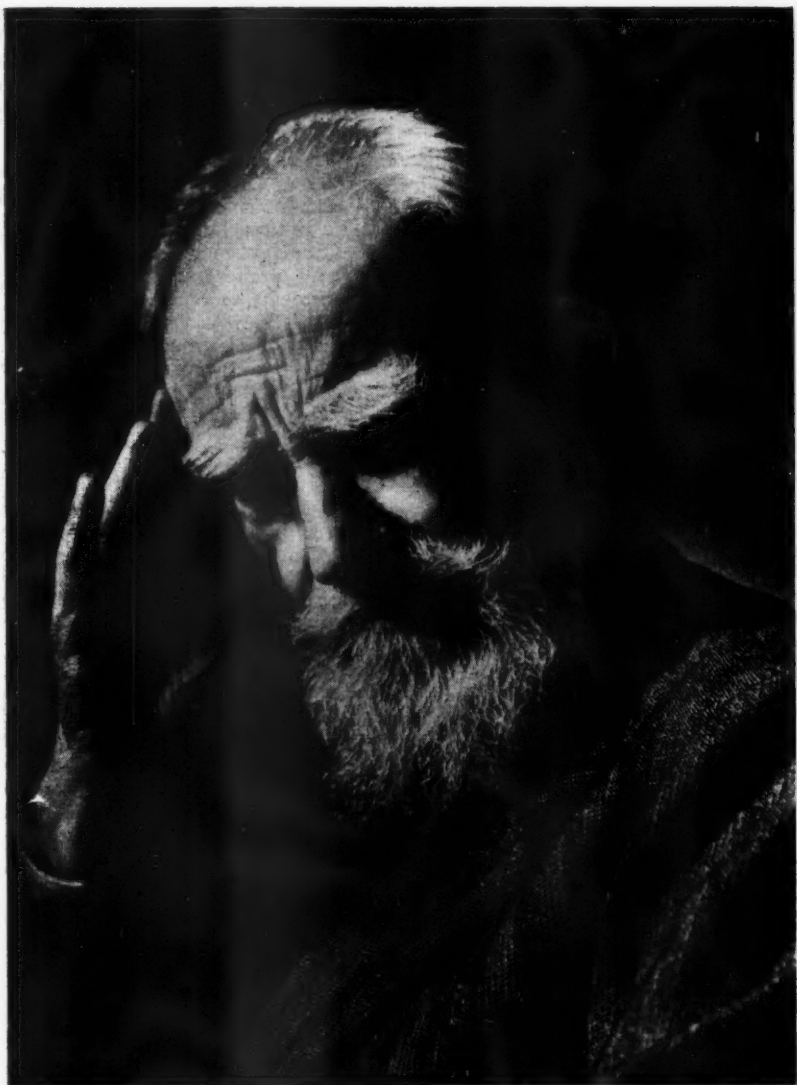
In the second season the Society increased its membership-limit to 500, gave an additional weekday matinee performance, and, in the players' interest, invited the Press to attend. The season ended with the production of *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, Janet



Camera Press

BERNARD SHAW,

*at the beginning of his
playwriting career: 1893.*



Camera Press

DRAMATIST

*a recent portrait study
by Karsh of Ottawa.*

Achurch appearing in the part written for Ellen Terry, Laurence Irving in that his father should have played, and Granville Barker as the American naval officer.

The Society, greatly daring, now announced its intention of performing *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, for which the Lord Chamberlain had refused a licence, and at once ran into difficult waters. A date early in December, 1901, had been chosen, but the manager whose theatre had been promised withdrew his permission. Application was then made successively, and in vain, to twelve theatres, two music-halls, three hotels and two picture-galleries. Finally, a very small stage was secured at the New Lyric Club in Coventry Street, and two afternoon performances were given on January 5th and 6th, 1902. In spite of the minute proportions of the stage and preposterously inadequate scenery the play was brilliantly acted, especially by Fanny Brough, superb as Mrs. Warren, and by Granville Barker as the a-moral clergyman's son Frank, a part giving him every opportunity to display that impish humour which was so large a part of his charm. Shaw appeared at the end of the first performance in brown tweeds, red tie, and with bristling rufous beard, to make a speech, the details of which I regret to have forgotten. It was the first time I had set eyes on a figure, later to become so familiar to me. Grant Richards brought out a "Stage Society" edition of the play with illustrations of the performers from photographs by F. H. Evans and a new preface by Shaw; he wrote: "It is not often that an author . . . is able to step on the stage and apply the strong word genius to the representation with the certainty of eliciting an instant and overwhelming assent from the audience."

At the end of the fourth season *The Admirable Bashville* was given what I believe was a rollicking performance, culminating in the appearance of

Aubrey Smith as the Policeman, with red beard and Irish accent, a replica of the author—probably the first of many such stage-representations.

Forbes Robertson had promised the Society that he and Gertrude Elliot would play the first act—the sphinx scene—from *Caesar and Cleopatra*, and this was announced for the fifth season. But his professional engagements and difficulties prevented him from fulfilling his promise and after several postponements the project had to be given up. Shaw suggested *Man and Superman* as an alternative, "to educate old Hankin who thinks it isn't a play at all." (St. John Hankin, the dramatist, was a member of the managing committee.)

Meanwhile, in the spring of 1904, six matinees of *Candida* had been given at the Court Theatre, Granville Barker playing Marchbanks, and these led in due course to the famous Vedrenne-Barker management with Shaw as dramatist-in-chief; which in its turn led to the gradual fulfilment of Max Beerbohm's prophecy.

Although he no longer looked to the Stage Society for the production of his plays, Shaw remained faithful. When the Society was incorporated in 1904 he and Mrs. Shaw became the first—and only—life members, at twenty guineas each. This, no doubt, was intended to provide the Society with a reserve fund, but in later years Shaw often spoke of it as a good stroke of business, since he would in the long run have paid much more as an annual subscriber. He also became a member of the Council of Management, and served for a number of years on the casting and production committee. When Vedrenne and Barker gave *Man and Superman* at the Court in the spring of 1905, the first two performances were reserved for the Society; and an unsigned programme-note, published in the *Stage Society News*, seems to disclose its authorship unmistakably.

In those days the Society celebrated

the end of each season with an annual dinner, and two of Shaw's speeches, happily, remain on record. In one of them, when the Court Theatre performances were well on their way, he still encourages the Society to persevere. "It is not our business to flourish; our business is always to be a forlorn hope. . . . When we began we had a monopoly not only of the most advanced plays, but of those plays which, owing to a certain leavening of — well — commonplace humour in them—I will not particularise the plays more especially—are capable of achieving even in London a commercially profitable run of, say, a fortnight." But "I shall do my best to produce plays in future of such an unheard of nature that even Vedrenne and Barker will blanch at the idea of producing them."

And the Society, in turn, remained faithful to Shaw whenever occasion offered. In 1909 *The Showing-up of Blanco Posnet* was refused a licence.

It was then produced by W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, outside the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction but in defiance of strong pressure from Dublin Castle; and the Stage Society arranged two performances in London by the original company in January, 1910. Lastly, two of Shaw's "Playlets of the War," *Augustus Does His Bit* and *O'Flaherty, V.C.* were performed in 1917 and 1920.

"I owe the Society almost as much as it owes me," Shaw is reported to have said once, and like so many of his jokes it contains a leaven of truth. Possibly the Society would not have carried through its forty years' pioneering without the early impetus Shaw's plays gave it; certainly Shaw was helped on his road to success by finding, through it, a stage for his earlier work when the theatre of the day regarded him with a cold, mistrustful eye.

SHAW AND THE DRAMA LEAGUE

by Geoffrey Whitworth

WHEN the League was in process of foundation two problems faced us. One was the need for a capital sum on which to start operations; the other a background of influential names which might give confidence both to possible donors and to the general body of play-lovers on whose support the League must ultimately depend. Bernard Shaw was inevitably among the first whose patronage was sought; and my good friend Norman Wilkinson (of golden fairy fame) was deputed to approach the great man personally. His reply was devastating and beyond appeal. G.B.S., almost alone among our targets, not only affirmed that he would have nothing to do with us, but accompanied his refusal with such a douche of icy

water that for the moment at any rate I was sorely tempted to abandon the whole project. He both questioned our competence to carry through the programme that we had set before us, and derided—as only he could—the lunatic folly that had led us to believe that we could achieve our aims with anything less than half a million pounds behind us. Had we taken up his challenge, we should have had to confess that we were tempting Providence with but a paltry two hundred!

Three years passed, during which the League might well have foundered on the rocks of bankruptcy had it not been for my wife and Elizabeth Fagan who came to our rescue with their series of highly successful stage balls. So far, however, as the general position

of the League was concerned, we had not done too badly. We were already "on the map," with a prestige perhaps unwarranted by our actual accomplishment. Our membership was growing steadily, if slowly, and by the beginning of 1921 I could really feel that we had turned the corner.

And then, one January morning, there arrived out of the blue an application-form for membership signed "George Bernard Shaw," together with a guinea for his first annual subscription. This I knew to be a greater compliment to the League than any gesture of patronage or generosity which he might have accorded to us three years earlier. It meant that Shaw, watching from afar, had come to the conclusion that the League was not such a crack-brain affair after all, but one with which he could honestly desire to be associated, and from which he might even derive some benefit. In particular it offered an ideal platform for the promulgation of certain opinions which he held on the vexed question of authors' fees. Hitherto it had been the practice for a five-guinea fee to be charged for every amateur performance of a full-length play. But Shaw was quick to realise that whereas in former times this may have been a reasonable method of payment, the new amateur movement, largely promoted by the League itself, would bring into being a vast number of small societies and dramatic groups for whom five guineas was a quite uneconomic proposition. Conversely, this fixed fee might turn out to be equally unfair to the authors, as for example when a large society was performing before an audience of hundreds or even thousands. His solution was payment on a percentage basis, as in the case of the professional theatre.

From this time onwards Shaw became a frequent attendant at our annual meetings in London, where he showed a punctilious regard to the formalities of debate, the legacy no doubt of his experience of official committee work

on the St. Pancras Borough Council and the Fabian Society. His sharp focus on the matter in hand was equally noticeable at the meetings of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee which for several years in the thirties took place at the headquarters of the League in Adelphi Terrace. He never strayed from the point, nor could he abide pomposity, and at the right moment would prick the bubble amid shouts of laughter in which he freely joined.

The most spectacular appearance of G.B.S. at a Drama League gathering was in Edinburgh at our Annual Conference in 1933. For this foray across the border I was determined that the League should appear in its most impressive aspect. Shaw was to be our trump card, and I well remember going to see him at Whitehall Court, and the trepidation with which I made my request. For Shaw was already in his eightieth year, and I was painfully conscious that I was asking him a lot. "How *can* I?" he said, "at my age, too? No, no. You are seeking the impossible. You must find a younger man." To attempt to persuade him would be importunate, and even unkind. But at that very moment entered, by the grace of God, Mrs. Shaw. "Look here," he turned to her, "this fellow wants me to go to Edinburgh on some wild goose chase or other. A night journey and all. I couldn't face it." "Of course you couldn't," she replied. "The whole idea's fantastic. You'd catch your death of cold." There was a moment of silence. Then suddenly the old warrior turned to me again, with a glint in his eye. "*I'll come!*" he said. So that was that. The imp of perversity had been too much for him. Charlotte had won my battle for me.

The great Assembly Hall at Edinburgh was filled to overflowing when Shaw rose to speak:—

"You have been induced," he began, "to come here to-day by the announcement that I was going to deliver an address on 'Some

Aspects of the British Drama.' You have been deluded. I have not the slightest intention of doing anything of the sort. I never did such a thing in my life. I am not here in the familiar person of Bernard Shaw talking on his own. I am here as the humble delegate of the Welwyn Garden City Theatre Society, and it is my duty to read the following resolution, and you will have to listen very carefully, because it is very long and involved:

"That this Conference urges the extreme importance as disinterested nurseries of drama and the art of acting of small dramatic enterprises started spontaneously by local residents—this takes a lot of breath—in villages and towns outside the commercial touring circuits, and calls the attention of playwrights—I am a playwright—to the wisdom of reserving to themselves personally the duty of licensing performances of their works by such enthusiasts on terms reasonably within their means though possibly not worth collecting commercially by their professional agents."

I wish there were space in which to quote the speech entire—the curious will find a verbatim report of it in *DRAMA* for December 1933—but the peroration was as follows:—

"Remember that Richard Wagner, the composer, said, quite truly, 'Music is kept alive not in our great opera houses and in our concert rooms, but on the cottage piano of the amateur.' I tell you—and this is my last word—that the drama in this country and in every country is not kept alive by the great theatres, although they do something for the highest departments of the art of acting, but by the love of the people for the drama and the attempts they make themselves, when they are starved by the professional circuits, to give

performances in the places the professional circuits do not reach. The object of the resolution which I now formally move is to make that as easy and as cheap as possible."

Needless to say, the resolution was carried unanimously though it was not one that was likely to appeal to all his fellow-dramatists. Far from it, and Shaw was provoked to return to the charge in an animated correspondence with Mr. Ashley Dukes in *DRAMA* for January 1938.

Once more in the winter number of 1946, he contributed a long article, not on authors' fees this time, but on Harley Granville-Barker whose death had recently occurred. This was a very intimate tribute, and it may be of interest to mention that it was one of the few occasions on which Shaw can ever have submitted to a censor's blue pencil. There were a few lines in his typescript which I felt might have given pain to a third party. He was quick to see my point and after a slight prevarication he deleted the doubtful passage. Immovable on any intellectual issue, on the personal plane he was ever courteous and understanding.

So passes our oldest and greatest member—one, surely, who will be long and gratefully remembered as "the father of the League."

SHAW AT MALVERN

by Barry Jackson

OVER the course of years I had been much impressed by the friendly and excited gatherings which supported the annual Shakespeare Festival at Stratford-upon-Avon and the Three Choirs Festivals at Hereford, Gloucester and Worcester. They formed a meeting place for those particularly interested in the works presented and the atmosphere of the intimate towns where they were held

was suffused with enthusiasm and delight. Nowadays we are satiated with Festivals all over the country and the "word is overworn," to quote Feste.

In 1928, however, there was not much of the kind and it was whilst walking over the Malvern Hills with Bernard Shaw that the idea of a Festival of Drama at Malvern came into my mind. My proposition met with some-

thing more than the customary twinkling enthusiasm which has been of unfathomable help to innumerable adventurers. "I must write you a play," he immediately said. And the result was a grey paper-bound volume on the title page of which appears:—

THE APPLE CART

My dear Barry,

Here is the play which owes its existence entirely to you.

G. Bernard Shaw.

Any Festival of the kind envisaged is all the better for some individual focal point. Bayreuth had Wagner, Salzburg Mozart, and Stratford Shakespeare; so it at once became apparent that our greatest living dramatist should be similarly honoured. The outstanding feature was his presence as the pivot around which all the hurly-burly revolved. During the nine years that the Festival programme was in my hands, G.B.S. dominated every activity, giving helpful advice when asked, criticising in generous terms, always ready and agreeable to do anything that was requested. The first Festival took place in 1929 and during two weeks the company performed *The Apple Cart*, *Back to Methuselah*, *Heartbreak House* and *Caesar and Cleopatra*. Members of the audiences, who had come from afar, were delighted. The locals, to put it mildly, were in a confused state of bewilderment. G.B.S. threw himself whole-heartedly into the holiday spirit as indeed he did for the succeeding eight years. He was invariably somewhere in the immediate vicinity—about the little town, walking over the hills, at afternoon parties, and frequently in the front of the circle watching the play which, as was his custom, he appeared to enjoy as much as the most loyal Shavian. His participation in all that was going on is amply documented by innumerable photographs and snapshots—talking to Lilian Baylis, the central figure in large groups of the company, chatting to Elgar, cutting young Penelope Drinkwater's birthday cake, busy with

his own camera at the bathing pool, studying his own programme in the theatre, and talking to impresarios from the U.S.A. He even joined in hilariously as the hero, in a very private amateur film in which he was refused admission to the house, was knocked down and rolled on the garden path.

In addition to *The Apple Cart*, G.B.S. provided my programme during the following years with three new works: *Too True to be Good*, *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles* and *The Millionairess*.

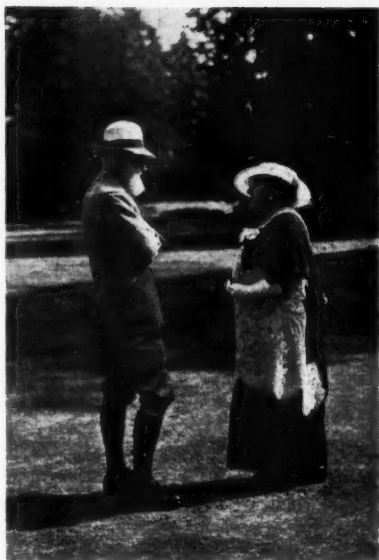
It frequently happened that owing to the stage being required for technicians, the company rehearsed in a nearby room of some considerable size. This was the Gas Office and odd scoffers passing by proclaimed that at long last it was serving its proper use. G.B.S. was an infrequent visitor to rehearsals which was perhaps just as well. Our time table was rigid for otherwise the work could never have been accomplished. When he did attend our author would deliver fascinating short-term lectures from which the artists derived intense amusement and satisfaction. The producer, however, seethed with anxiety to get on with his job. In London with perhaps six weeks to rehearse only one play, such interludes would be welcomed, but with six plays on the stocks the loss of even fifteen minutes was irreparable. There was the dress rehearsal of *St. Joan*, for example, with G.B.S. present from beginning to end. Thanks to delightful interludes of discussion by G.B.S., the rehearsal drifted on until well after midnight. The overtime bill was staggering and G.B.S. was quite surprised when I mentioned the fact to him next day.

In the seasons of 1931, 1932 and 1933 examples of English plays from various periods were staged in chronological order. This plan met with considerable success. Not a few members of our audiences, G.B.S. among them, were amazed to find what a deep impression the earliest and simplest examples of our British theatre made, due no doubt

to their sincerity. I heard him repeatedly quoting *Hick Scorer*: "Worse was it never." He was always interested in early plays. He examined my typed copy of the then recently discovered *Susanna and the Elders*. It now displays, in G.B.S.'s meticulously neat handwriting, a number of emendations and alterations, denoting sincere study and that same care with which he emended letters typed by himself almost right up to the end of his life.

His eightieth birthday coincided with one of the Festivals. He knew that he would be besieged by callers, interviewers and telephone messages if he remained in the town, and he appealed to me for a plan to get away for the day. It was simply arranged and quite early in the morning Mr. and Mrs. Shaw, myself and two intimate friends climbed into two cars and quietly went off into the surrounding countryside. As it was Sunday there was no theatre and no social obligations to be met. The staff at the Swan at Tenbury entered into the "secret" spirit of it all and so, even at luncheon in a public dining room, G.B.S. went officially unrecognised and spent his birthday as he wished—in happy privacy.

For their sojourns at Malvern, Mr. and Mrs. Shaw chose a quiet hotel where they might go in and out observed by as few people as possible. This desire for seclusion, strange as it may appear in one who could undeniably blow his own trumpet, was well exemplified when I asked the hall porter at a coastal resort if Mr. Shaw was in. He replied that he did not know. I expressed surprise that such a guest could escape notice. The explanation offered was that Mr. Shaw sometimes went out by the fire escape, no doubt to assure himself of its efficacy, though other residents with adjacent windows complained loudly!



Elsie Fogerty entertains G.B.S. at her annual Garden Party at Malvern, 1934.

During the last Festival with which I was connected, however, the Shaws stayed with me. One picture I shall always retain is of G.B.S. at the piano, playing and singing an entire act of *Don Giovanni*, with Mrs. Shaw, comfortably installed in an armchair, inspecting the daily bundles of Press cuttings, a task which would have occupied the entire attention of a wholtime secretary.

It is not without a feeling of acute distress, after so many years of laborious effort to found a Festival dedicated to one of our greatest dramatic writers, that I learn that its continuation is in jeopardy . . . However that may be, the days at Malvern have left indelible memories upon those who took part and who came from far and wide to pay homage to George Bernard Shaw.

G.B.S. AS DRAMATIC CRITIC

A speech delivered in St. Pancras Town Hall on the occasion of the Evening of Tribute offered by the Borough and the British Drama League to the memory of "the First Freeman of St. Pancras and for ever a freeman of the theatre and of the world."

"CRITIC" is a horrible word: it splutters and crackles on the tongue. When I hear it I think of Congreve's unkind remarks in the epilogue to *The Mourning Bride*:

To poison plays I see some where they sit
Scattered like ratsbane up and down the
pit;

While others watch, like parish-searchers,
hired

To tell of what disease the play expired.

But most dramatic critics—I can speak for my colleagues at least—never regard themselves as specks of ratsbane or death-watch beetles. The foundation for dramatic criticism is a profound love of the theatre, a capacity for sustained excitement. That was what Bernard Shaw had. Though he sometimes dissembled his love, we are conscious when we read his dramatic criticism that he was always head over ears the theatre's slave.

I have been reading again the three volumes of *Our Theatres in the Nineties*. Between January 1895 and May 1898 subscribers to the *Saturday Review* could read the tale of the West End stage by flashes of lightning. Bernard Shaw was a storm over Shaftesbury Avenue. He entered the theatre not with coy hesitancy but with a firm stride. He did not—as someone has observed—leave his brains at the cloak-room with his hat. He took the theatre seriously as—

"A Factory of Thought, a Prompter of Conscience, an Elucidator of Social Conduct, an Armoury against Despair and Dullness and a Temple of the Ascent of Man."

And feeling as he did, he *preached* about the theatre—the word is his own—in the essays that fill more than a thousand pages of the Standard Edition: the wisest and wittiest and most gloriously infuriating sermons on the stage ever delivered. The placid

theatre of the eighteen nineties was alarmed. It had no idea that it was a factory of thought and a temple of the Ascent of Man. Shaw left it in no doubt. A local preacher in my Cornish village used to say: "Friends, let the Word thump 'ee with great thumps." That always recurs to me when I hear Fabian in *Twelfth Night* explaining to Sir Andrew that "with some excellent jests fire-new from the mint, you should have banged the youth into dumbness." Both phrases bring me back to Shaw as, talking at the top of his voice with the shield of Ibsen borne before him, he thumped the London theatre with great thumps—banging his opponents into dumbness with those jests, fire-new from the mint, that he could strike off until the end of his life. He believed implicitly in the things for which he crusaded. In what he called his "siege laid to the theatre of the nineteenth century" he never ceased to press his attack, to advocate the doctrinal play, to rail at stage carpentry, to develop his theories of pure speech. There are magnificent essays, on Forbes-Robertson's *Hamlet*, on the early Ibsen performances, on Pinero, on the Lyceum *Cymbeline*. Only Shaw could have written the epitaph on BLANK, a play in blank acts by BLANK, which he saw at one of the old theatres in the Strand. For some reason he was not supplied with a programme, so he never discovered the name of the piece. At the end of the second act the play had advanced about as far as Ibsen would have brought it ten years before curtain-rise, and when at the interval G.B.S. strolled out into the Strand for a little exercise he had a lapse of memory.

"Unfortunately, I forgot all about my business and actually reached home before

it occurred to me that I had not seen the end of the play."

I cannot resist reminding you of that very small, but so Shavian, comment in a *Hamlet* notice. He was disappointed in the actor who played the Ghost. He said:

"The voice is not a bad voice; but it is the voice of a man who does not believe in ghosts. Moreover, it is a hungry voice, not that of one who is past eating."

Shaw's three years as a critic were too soon over. In the early summer of 1898 he made his farewell:—

"I have sworn an oath to endure no more of it. The subject is exhausted; and so am I. Still the gaiety of nations must not be eclipsed. The younger generation is knocking at the door, and as I open it there steps sprightly in the incomparable Max... I am off duty for ever and am going to sleep."

That was fifty-two years ago. During those fifty-two years Bernard Shaw was never off duty. Not much more than four years ago I had occasion to ask him to review a book on the theatre, and he wrote back: "I cannot

guarantee to get it all into 1800 words. Reserve two or three pages for me." We shall always reserve many pages, many chapters, many books for Bernard Shaw. May I at the last remind you of what the Poet Laureate, John Masefield, wrote of Shaw four years ago on his ninetieth birthday:

After these ninety years he can survey
Changes enough, so many due to him:
Old wax-work melted down, old tinsel
dim,
Old sentimental clockwork put away.

There the old playthings with their lovers lie;
But he remains, the bright mind ever
young,

The glorious great heart, the witty tongue,
Erasing Shaw who made the folly die.

J. C. TREWIN

MARGARET MACNAMARA

MANY members of the Drama League will grieve to learn of the death of Margaret Macnamara, on November 24th, 1950. She was elected a member of our Community Theatre Committee in 1921, and was appointed Secretary in 1926. A year later she initiated and organised at Kings College, Campden Hill, the first Drama School ever held by the League. This was followed by a series of other schools, culminating in the first residential Summer School at St. Andrews in 1931. She was also a dramatist of some distinction. Her first play, *The Gates of the Morning*, aroused the interest of Bernard Shaw, and was produced by the Stage Society in 1908. Among twenty-five other plays, more particularly suited to amateur performance, were a modernised version of *St. George and the Turkish Knight*, *I Have Five Daughters*, *Elizabeth Refuses*, and *Wives and Daughters*.

Steel-like in her loyalty to the causes she had at heart (among them the cause of world peace for which she worked with unobtrusive vehemence), and endowed with a rare sense of humour, she will be remembered with affection by all who came under her influence.

G.W.



BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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1951

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PLAYS IN PERFORMANCE

THE restored, repainted and re-staged Old Vic reopened its doors on November 14th to an excited audience composed of many who were glad to be back again, and many more who had never seen the old shabby but glorious home of Shakespeare at Cheap Prices. The (relatively) cheap prices were there; I regret that I cannot say as much for Shakespeare. On the assumption that *Twelfth Night* needs jollying-up to make it acceptable to theatre-sated audiences, the production by Hugh Hunt was first class; but for those who want the comedy that Shakespeare wrote it was nonsensical. The permanent setting by Roger Furse was admirable in itself, but silly for the play. Silly, in the modern, not Shakespearean, sense, is indeed a mild word for the entire production. Imagine Orsino and Olivia living opposite each other on a quayside, with a *Beggar's Opera* chorus that mumbled and tumbled, providing a ragged band of musicians, who serenaded the mourning Olivia, with Orsino leaping out of doors to beg them to play on. No one who did not see the incredible scene can possibly imagine it. There is a new large apron stage, to which the players will have to get used; at present they keep for the most part safely behind the imaginary proscenium arch, and the proximity of the audience seems to alarm them. I hope the virtues of Shakespeare will soon be rediscovered at the Old Vic.

Tyrone Guthrie displays strength and weakness in *Top of the Ladder* at the St. James's (October 11), chiefly weakness. The piece represents the delirium on his deathbed of a man who has reached success. It is written in the manner of Thornton Wilder, but without that dramatist's economy and concentration. Moreover, it is written from the point of view of an old woman, a nurse (Esmé Church) who takes the place of the American's Stage Manager. The man who should have been the

protagonist, played by John Mills, is no more than a puppet, his life dominated by mother (Alison Leggatt), wife (Rachel Kempson) and secretary (Mary Kerridge). The production is prodigiously clever, crowded with naturalistic detail, and altogether as inarticulate as the writing.

There is nothing inarticulate about Terence Rattigan's *Who is Sylvia?* at the Criterion (October 24), about a man (Robert Flemyng) who becomes an ambassador, and imagines himself throughout his life to be in love with a girl he met at seventeen. As this causes him to live a double life, which he wrongly supposes to be hidden from everybody, except his old friend (Roland Culver) who acts as Chorus, the comedy makes a strong feminine attraction, confirmed by the appearance of the broad-minded wife (Athene Seyler) at the end. Written a little unsurely, and produced with equal hesitation by Anthony Quayle, it will none the less be seen in due course throughout the country, for it is easy, and vastly entertaining.

Also deserving attention is Jan de Hartog's *The Fourposter* at the Ambassador's (October 12). Here two characters, and a single scene with five property changes, occupy a rather short evening. Michael Denison and Dulcie Gray meet the acting demands of the play which has the great merit of offering at least substantial scraps of drama.

A performance I would not have missed for a good deal was Keats's tragedy *Otho the Great* (St. Martin's, November 26). Read biographers and stage historians and you will learn that the play has no merit. If nobility of expression is no merit they are right; but while the play has the terrible weaknesses of the historical melodramas of its time, it possesses elevation and grandeur, responded to whole-heartedly by the excellent company.

C. B. PURDOM

THEATRE BOOKSHELF

THE VARIORUM "SONNETS"

"A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare. *The Sonnets*." Hyder Edward Rollins. Two Vols. J. P. Lippincott Co. £7.

The term "Variorum" to denote an edition of Shakespeare's works with an *apparatus criticus* derived from a number of sources was first applied to the Reed-Steevens edition in twenty-one volumes, 1803, mainly reprinted, 1813. These two issues were followed in 1821 by the much more elaborate Boswell-Malone edition, known as the "third Variorum." Thus when an American critic, Henry Howard Furness of Philadelphia, began in 1871 to edit the plays, volume by volume, with an even more enlarged textual apparatus and commentary, he called his enterprise "a New Variorum Edition." A special feature of his edition was the inclusion in the commentary of passages giving the views of editors and critics up to the date of publication. Fifteen plays were issued before his death in 1912. His place as editor was taken by his son, H. H. Furness, Junior, till he died in 1930. The plan was then sponsored by the Modern Language Association of America, with J. G. Adams as General Editor and a supervisory committee and different editors for each volume.

The latest of these editors is Professor Hyder Edward Rollins of Harvard who has won distinction in particular by his editions of Elizabethan anthologies. How colossal a task he undertook in becoming "Variorum" editor of *The Sonnets* is apparent from the fact that except for *Hamlet* it is the first in the series to require two volumes. And owing to war and post-war conditions its arrival in this country after publication in 1944 was greatly delayed.

Volume I reproduces the text of the *Sonnets* in the 1609 quarto, misprints included, from the copy that belonged to George Steevens, now in the

Huntington Library. With it have been collated the twelve other known copies, and any variants in these have been recorded in the textual notes. Next in order of time come the variants in the 146 (out of the 154) Sonnets included by John Benson, together with other pieces, in the so-called *Poems Written by Wil. Shakespeare* 1640. There follow over 50 editions between 1710 and 1942 of which the textual readings are recorded, and which, together with twenty-seven others, furnish matter for the commentary that accompanies each sonnet. Perhaps only Elizabethan specialists can fully appreciate the immense labour thus involved and the value of its results.

But for most readers of DRAMA the chief interest of this edition will be in the second volume where, in fourteen Appendices, Professor Rollins gives a generous summary of the multifarious answers that have been given to the problems that the *Sonnets* raise. These include, among others, their date and arrangement, the question of their autobiographical significance, Master "W. H." and Thorpe's dedication, the identity of the friend, the dark woman, and the rival poet. The outcome is an amazing medley in which the results of genuine scholarship and research jostle with well-nigh lunatic absurdities. To all alike, in accord with the "Variorum" plan, Professor Rollins extends impartial hospitality. But he sometimes ironically puts side by side what seems "inconceivable" to one critic yet is accepted by another. And he makes play with Sir Sidney Lee who without explanation varied between the interpretation of the *Sonnets* as autobiographical and fanciful, and between the two Earls, Southampton and Pembroke, as the friend. Incidentally one is glad to be reminded that Southampton was first put forward as a candidate by Nathan Drake in 1817 and Pembroke by James Boaden in 1832.

These dates are a signpost that the vogue of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (as the Professor terms it) did not begin till the nineteenth century. As late as 1793 Steevens declared that "the strongest Act of Parliament that could be framed would fail to compel readers into their service." Thereafter the tide turned with a vengeance. Amongst the tributes here collected are those of later poets, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Rossetti. And in this memorial number of DRAMA one must recall that Bernard Shaw was in 1910 sufficiently a "Pembrokist" to see Mary Fitton as *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*, though he admitted in 1914 that after Arthur Acheson's interpretation of *Willobie and his Avis* Mistress Davenant would have been more "up to date". Ominous phrase! Even this 1944 invaluable storehouse of the *Sonnets* literature, for which we are deeply grateful to Professor Rollins, has now in 1950 to be supplemented by Dr. Leslie Hotson's challenging interpretation of "the mortal moon" in sonnet 107 as the Armada, and Mr. Willson Disher's revival (*Times Lit. Supp.* Oct. 20, 27. Nov. 3) of Mary Fitton's claim.

F. S. BOAS

FROM THE GREEK

"*Oedipus and Theseus*," by André Gide.
Secker and Warburg, 7s. 6d.

"*Aeschylus and Athens*," by George Thomson.
Lawrence and Wishart, 10s. 6d.

These two books attest, in their very different ways, the enduring vitality of classical myth. M. Gide is an aesthete, taking the drama of Oedipus and turning it into a conversation piece. He does not compete with Sophocles; the tragedy of this Oedipus is more than personal, for he had desired, as M. Gide has perhaps desired, to make Man independent of the gods. He represents the quest for happiness where Tiresias represents the need for salvation. "I can picture the time, far distant from our own, when the earth will be peopled

by a race of men owing allegiance to no one, who will look back upon our civilisation of to-day as we ourselves look back upon the condition of man at the beginning of his slow progress..." M. Gide has always been among the more intelligent of those who have believed in the myth of progress.

"*Oedipus*" was written in 1930; "*Theseus*" is the author's most recent work. Both belong to the same mood. Theseus describes in a beautiful and easy prose how he won Phaedra, lay with Ariadne, and slew the Minotaur. Very characteristic is this monster in the guise of a lovely and indolent young man. But Theseus, like Oedipus, transcends his private griefs, and ends up in the loneliness of unimpassioned intellect, governing a great city for its good. As Mr. John Russell suggests in his introduction, Theseus is less a man than a committee with Gide as its chairman. Goethe is there, too, with Valéry and Racine's Titus. Mr. Russell has translated both these works quite admirably.

Aeschylus and Athens is a new edition of Professor Thomson's monumental piece of Marxist special pleading. The book is easy and interesting to read, and is pleasantly produced at a low price. It would be impossible to discuss, and impertinent to dismiss, Professor Thomson's thesis in the space of a short review. The development of myth and its translation into drama are related to the class struggles of ancient Athens, and no aesthetic considerations distract Professor Thomson from the party line. He accepts Prometheus without question as the patron saint of the proletariat. Professor Thomson wields a formidable scholarship, but it seems almost incredible that anyone so happily familiar with classical wisdom should end up in the pawn-shop philosophy of Marxism. The mysticism of the Orphic cults is of course dismissed as hysteria, and what will any reader who has been moved by *Oedipus* make of the following?

"The Oedipus of Sophocles is a symbol of the deep-seated perplexity engendered in men's minds by the unforeseen and incomprehensible transformation of a social order designed to establish liberty and equality into an instrument for the destruction of liberty and equality."

We wonder why Professor Thomson goes on calling himself a democrat since democracy is always disappointing him. But when his own sympathies are responding to the Greek thirst for liberty, he should not be denied a hearing. He lets the shutters fall so loudly that we know exactly where we are.

ROBERT SPEAIGHT.

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"Goldsmith," *Selected Works*, chosen by Richard Garnett. Reynard Library. 21s.

"Thomas Lovell Beddoes," *Plays and Poems*. Ed. H. W. Donner. Routledge. 12s. 6d.

"The Corn is Green" and two other plays, by Emlyn Williams. "The Winslow Boy" and two other plays, by Terence Rattigan. "Three Time Plays," by J. B. Priestley. Pan Books. 2s. each.

"The Plays of J. B. Priestley," Volume III. Heinemann. 16s.

"The Best One-Act Plays of 1948-49." Selected by J. W. Marriott. Harrap. 8s. 6d.

"Six London Plays," by H. F. Rubinstein and Vera I. Arlett. Gollancz. 7s. 6d.

"Four Short Plays," by Anton Tchekov. Trans. Julian West. Duckworth. 3s. 6d.

In addition to *She Stoops to Conquer* and *The Good Natur'd Man*, Richard Garnett's selection from Goldsmith's work in the "Reynard Library" appears to contain most of the "poor doctor's" more important writings, either in full, or in valuable extracts. One more picture emerges, not only of Goldsmith's lovable yet complex character, but of the remarkable period through which he struggled. Thomas Lovell Beddoes also had his struggles, but remains comparatively unknown, although he captured without affectation the spirit of the Elizabethans in his macabre work, of which "Death's

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Jest-Book" is the outstanding example. This extraordinary play and two others, with poems and dramatic fragments now appears in a volume of "The Muses' Library," edited by H. W. Donner, who contributes a long but not particularly revealing introduction.

The volumes in the "Pan Books" series should be useful, as each one gives three well-known plays by well-known dramatists. To read those by Emlyn Williams is to realise afresh how adroitly this writer uses the Welsh idiom and atmosphere to create effective scenes. *The Corn is Green* stands easily ahead of the others; it is delightful throughout. The same can hardly be said of the slightly embarrassing *The Wind of Heaven* while *The Druid's Rest*, despite amusing detail, remains a disappointment. The three plays by Terence Rattigan include (perhaps inevitably) *French Without Tears*. Although this play brought the author fame and fortune, it is not to be compared with the other two in the book: *Flare Path*, still a vivid picture of the Air Force world, and *The Winslow Boy*, where a theme in which Galsworthy would have delighted, is treated with a modern ease and dexterity. Then there are J. B. Priestley's *Three Time Plays*. The present writer agrees with the author in liking *Time and the Conways* the best—with *Dangerous Corner* a close second, although Mr. Priestley seems to have tired of his brilliant first play. Both these plays are more successful than the involved *I Have Been Here Before*, which, it is not surprising to learn, was troublesome to write.

Volume III of *The Plays of J. B. Priestley* shows this prolific dramatist more in the mood of social reform. In an introduction he discusses the plays, admitting the triumph of *They Came to a City* (and surely by now *An Inspector Calls* is an acknowledged success?), but seems more puzzled than readers will be over the failure of *Cornelius*, *People at Sea*, and *Home is To-morrow*. The sincerity which never fails the author at great moments,

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adds some conviction to *Summer Day's Dream*, and creates memorable scenes in *Desert Highway*.

All the work reviewed up to now was stimulating, even when it varied in merit, which makes the descent to the modern one-act play somewhat chilly. J. W. Marriott in *The Best One Act Plays of 1948-49* shows his usual fine taste and discrimination, but the task of selection could not have been easy. One or two in the book stand out—*Ophelia* (T. B. Morris, 7 f.) is an interesting verse play, and *The Tinsel Duchess* (Philip Johnson, 3 m. 2 f.) is refreshing because of its purely theatrical values, but at present one-act plays have not the vitality they had when this famous series began. H. F. Rubinstein and Vera I. Arlett's *Six London Plays* are somewhat different and range in period from the ninth century to the twentieth. A deep affection for the great city links together colourful incidents in which we meet Hamlet (on his English visit), Chaucer, Pepys, Blake (a fine study), witness a quarrel between Gilbert and Sullivan, and have a glimpse of the mingled feelings with which Londoners faced the post-war world.

Tchegov always maintained that his plays were amusing and even at times farcical, but only in some of his one-act satires is this true. The volume containing *The Bear*, *The Proposal*, *The Wedding* and *The Anniversary* will be servicable, especially as the translator, Julius West, has preserved the essentially Russian atmosphere on which much of the humour depends.

F. SLADEN-SMITH.

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"*He That Plays the King*," by Kenneth Tynan. Longmans. 12s. 6d.

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weakens them: Mr. Tynan is an Infant Phenomenon, and—in common with the mother of the phenomenal Miss Crummles—is able to stand on his head on the butt-end of a spear, surrounded by the blazing fireworks of his prose.

You will gather that this is not a mild, curds-and-cream book. In no sense: it has a savage gusto; it is written in Eracles' vein, a tyrant's vein. In his first chapter Mr. Tynan sweeps from his path with a magnificent gesture all practising dramatic critics (all save one). He observes also that his ideal critic must be "something between a latter-day substitute for Lorenzo de' Medici, and a terrible Judex of an aesthetic Dies Irae." This prologue and the epilogue (which Mr. Tynan may read, startled, in later years) are both rather silly, but between them you will find a remarkable amount of sharp observation, vigorously phrased, contentious opinion, and vivid summoning of all kinds of players from Sid Field to Frederick Valk. At his finest, as in his chapter on Five Eccentrics, Mr. Tynan can write like an angel (tyrant, angel, phenomenon: yes, I know), and for this you will be able to forgive him his occasional exhibitionism and so sad an error as his misquotation from Cleopatra. He ascribes to her these words:

"I am fire and air;

My baser elements I give to lower life."

Let me quote from the book at its best:—

Audiences always love (not merely approve or prefer) perfect articulation; a sharp, cutting voice which, though it projects a very fountain of words, leaves each one distinct, shaped and crisp; each uttered (as Olivier, as Barrault utters them) with no contortion of the face. It demonstrates command: the ability to make words perform for you, skip, leap and gyrate, or, in Max Beerbohm's phrase, "tread in their precedence, like kings, gravely." That is Danny Kaye's treasure: and now we must wonder whether he can develop, and ask ourselves whether we can count as a great comic artist a man who is, when we reduce him to essentials, no more than a flurry of sound. He has always seemed lost without his wife's lyrics, and power like his should acknowledge no such limits.

And at its worst:—

I am a shell: I catch sound, hold it, swirl it resonantly about, supplying an overtone here, there smoothing a grace-note away, and then, in time, jaculating it forth again, a different sound, a new sound.

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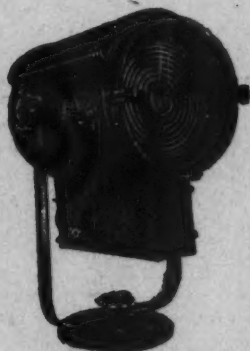
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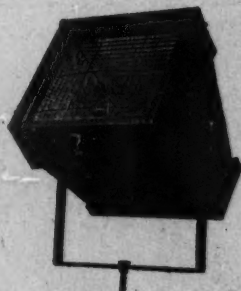
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PUBLISHED BY THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE, 9 FITZROY SQUARE, LONDON, W.1., and
PRINTED BY THOMAS KNIGHT & CO. LTD., THE CLOCK HOUSE PRESS,
HODDESDON, HERTS.

1951